



## BRAIN HEALTH BOOST



### Living Alone Without Being Lonely

*The Brain Health Initiative (BHI) is working to develop brain healthy communities, creating a culture that promotes brain health protective factors and decreases risk factors, thereby improving brain health, optimizing brain performance, and preventing and fighting brain illness across the lifespan for the Florida Suncoast region and beyond. **Today, we are looking at the pros and cons of living alone and its implications to our brain health and performance.***

Loneliness is not about being alone. Many people live alone and are perfectly happy, while others live in a house filled with people and still feel disconnected and lonely. The difference between being alone and being lonely is our social connections. Feeling connected to others makes us happy, healthy, and more productive.

Living alone can be empowering. People who have always shared their home, their meals, and their life with others, may find being on their own is liberating. They can eat when and what they want, sleep when the urge strikes, and have total control over the TV remote.

But studies show that being lonely can have a negative impact on our physical and brain health and performance, including our immune system, blood pressure, cognitive function, mood, weight, and sleep. According to an article in [Harvard Health](#), people who are lonely are more likely to have increased risk for brain illness and may become anxious and depressed. In addition, people living alone tend to neglect their health or fail to recognize the signs of failing health. Often, we need someone else to recognize the signs of illness and insist we see a doctor.

For people who live alone, the best way to conquer loneliness is to stay active and socially engaged. Even people who love their independence need social connections to remain healthy. Coming home to an empty house and spending hours on end by ourselves will eventually lead to feelings of loneliness. Whether it's volunteering, becoming active in [MVP Sports and Social Club](#), joining a senior center, starting an exercise, golf, or racquet program, joining an arts and culture program, becoming active in a book club, or becoming part of an online community — we all need to get out of the house and be around others.

Our social connections help us thrive, boost our brain health, and give us resilience against brain illness. With the support of family and friends we can face each day with peak brain performance as we journey forward.

## WHAT YOU CAN DO TODAY TO PROTECT YOUR BRAIN HEALTH

Research suggests that if you feel lonely or isolated you are at increased risk for a shortened lifespan, as well as developing physical and brain illness, including coronary artery disease, stroke, depression, high blood pressure, and declining cognitive skills. The BHI and [Harvard Health](#) recommend these actions to keep you connected and brain healthy.

- **Connect with family and friends.** Whether it's by phone, video chat, or meeting in person, find a way to connect that works for you.
- **Practice gratitude.** Loneliness may cause you to focus on your hardships. Aim to express your appreciation toward friends, family, and strangers and be thankful for the good things in your life.
- **Focus on things you can control.** Spending time dwelling on your hardships can perpetuate loneliness; rather, focus your attention on something within your control and work at it.
- **Keep busy.** Complete a project, join a sports group, take a class, start a new hobby — find something you enjoy and get involved.
- **Get rid of negativity.** Surround yourself with people and activities that bring you joy. If current events are bringing you down, take a break from the news or at least limit your consumption. And smile! The act of smiling can make you feel better.
- **Be kind, understanding, and patient with yourself.** Treat yourself the way you treat others — with compassion. Fun interactions will help you and those around you, resulting in deeper connections.
- **Find balance.** Develop a routine that provides balance and familiarity in your life. Your daily plan should include physical activity, time for connecting with loved ones, a project or hobby, and relaxing.
- **BE BRAIN HEALTHY and adopt a lifestyle** that includes thoughts, behaviors, emotions, responses, and language that promote brain health protective factors:
  - Stress resilience
  - Nutrition
  - Physical activity
  - Sleep
  - Social connection
  - Emotional wellbeing
  - Meaning and Purpose
  - Cognitive stimulation and creativity
  - Engaging with nature
  - General health
  - Positive impacts

**About the Brain Health Initiative ([www.brainhealthinitiative.org](http://www.brainhealthinitiative.org))**

The Brain Health Initiative (BHI) is a cutting-edge approach to protecting brain health, promoting brain performance, and preventing and fighting brain illness across the lifespan. The BHI is creating brain healthy communities, cultures that foster brain health protective factors and address risk factors, thereby improving brain health and optimizing brain performance outcomes for the Florida Suncoast region and beyond. Join the ***Be Brain Healthy*** movement, ***because brain health matters, and lifestyle makes a difference.*** To view all Brain Health Boosts [click here](#).